The Curse of Consciousness

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/57324799.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	M/M, F/F
Fandom:	Hazbin Hotel (Cartoon)
Relationships:	Eve/Rosie (Hazbin Hotel), Alastor & Eve & Rosie & Vox (Hazbin Hotel), Alastor/Vox (Hazbin Hotel)
Characters:	Alastor (Hazbin Hotel), Eve (Hazbin Hotel), Rosie (Hazbin Hotel), Vox's Mother (Hazbin Hotel), Alastor's Mother (Hazbin Hotel), Vox (Hazbin Hotel)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Human, Historical Inaccuracy, Christian Themes, Religious Guilt, Religious Conflict, Sexuality Crisis, Gender Issues, Boys In Love, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, Suicidal Thoughts, Internalized Homophobia, Homophobia, Body Worship, Non-Sexual Intimacy, Fluff and Angst, sort of ooc, we're completely ignoring the First World War, Self-Indulgent
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-07-19 Updated: 2024-07-27 Words: 17,675 Chapters: 2/4

The Curse of Consciousness

by Pearl_of_amphitrite

Summary

> “I want to wear your skin like it’s my own.” Alastor’s fingers were unbuttoning his shirt. His lips found Vox’s collarbones. “I want to blend every piece of you together and consume you.”
>
> Or: an au in which Vox and Alastor met when they were alive

Chapter 1: Make a new excuse, another stupid reason

Chapter Notes

Please mind the tags. This one is quite angsty

I'm going with the headcanon that Vox was born in 1900 to help keep track of his age

This chapter isn't explicit. That aspect comes in in the next one

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1924

Vox despised the fact that he was born. The fact that two people had come together to create him- *him*, not any other human- was sickening. Not the creation itself or the stages that had led up to his birth, but the fact that it was *him* that had been created.

Why, he'd asked himself time and time again, was it his soul that had been knit together, crafted perfectly and wonderfully, and tossed into the world? Why had he come into creation? Why could he not have remained an anonymous mass in space, or another atom in the void, or simply nothing. Not a single thing. Not being formed as a concept, or a new being to be sculpted, or a soul. Why did he have to have a soul?

This wasn't depression. He was past that. It had claimed its chokehold on him in high school like a swirling mass of darkness. It's grip was strong and relentless and he'd only managed to rid himself of it when he turned nineteen.

It wasn't that he wanted to die either. He was past that too. He could now hold knifes without having panic attacks, or stand at the edge of balcony and not feel the sickeningly strong allure to jump.

No, he knew that death or hopelessness got him nowhere. Now, he only felt a deep sort of sadness tug at his bones at the fact that he had a consciousness. At the fact that he was a real person with a life to be lived. At the fact that he even existed to begin with.

1912

Both of his parents were highly religious. Both had instilled their believes upon him at a young age. Both of them had sheltered him severely from topics that contradicted their beliefs. In turn, he'd been left to navigate how to feel about such things on his own.

Homosexual was a word whispered among peers, a word that, he felt, held some kind of strange weight behind it. He'd seen two boys kissing after school behind a tree in the

courtyard. He'd only blinked and considered that twelve years old was a little too young for that much tongue.

Later, he'd heard that they'd been caught and were facing the risk of expulsion.

"Why?" he'd asked a classmate of his, not understanding how two boys kissing in the school yard was any worse than that time a boy and a girl had been found doing far more intimate things in the locker room.

The classmate had simply given him a strange look and told him it was bad.

"It's a *sin,*" she'd said in hushed tones like the words themselves burnt her tongue. "They have something wrong with them."

"Oh," Vox said, because that was all he *could* say.

When he got home that day, he'd asked his mother if such a thing was truly a sin; if God truly cared if the people he loved liked someone of their own sex. Her expression had gone blank and her frame had frozen in place. When she turned to him with that look on her face, he had the horrible sense that he'd said entirely the wrong thing.

"Where did you learn that?" she'd asked him, like he'd recited some kind of terrible curse.

He'd told her school. She'd gone quiet for a second before saying "I see" too softly for his liking. And then she'd resumed cleaning the dish she was busy with.

"It's unnatural, Vince," she'd told him like it was another fact of life. "Two boys or two girls wanting to be together? That's not in accordance to the Bible."

Again, Vox had only uttered a quiet "oh" before moving on.

Liking boys wasn't on the table for him, then. That was fine. He'd only ever really found girls pretty. Not that he wanted to date anyone just yet. Twelve years old felt far too young to be dwelling on that sort of thing.

1915

When Vox turned fifteen, the neighbours across the street moved out and a younger couple moved in. Vox's mother had insisted on having a dinner with them to welcome them the neighbourhood. Vox had begrudgingly agreed to join her.

What his mother had failed to mention was that they had a son two years older than him with fluffy brown hair and an easy smile. Vox found himself staring and stumbling over his words when he spoke to Alastor. The older boy seemed to take this all in stride without a hint of patronisation.

After the dinner, Alastor's mother had insisted that Alastor show Vox his room, as if the two of them were five and in need of a playmate. Vox supposed he hadn't made many friends throughout school, so perhaps his mother had grown desperate. When Vox and Alastor were

alone in Alastor's room, Alastor confessed the same thing. And then he showed Vox his record collection.

"I've been saving them," Alastor said, his voice as smooth as silk as he hauled out a cardboard box from the back of his closet and brought it over to his bed. He set it down on the duvet the way one would set down an item created from fine china. "I'm planning to play them on my radio show when I'm older."

Vox had tilted his head.

Seventeen felt a little too old for such ambitions. Creative fields weren't kind or stable.

Vox's hands were tucked into his pockets and he rocked on his shoes, unsure of where he was allowed to exist. He watched how Alastor ran an index finger along the lot of record cases, and thought that Alastor's hands looked rather slender. Feminine. The thought was promptly kicked from his mind.

"Radio show?"

"Yes!" Alastor said, his grin widening. "I plan to become a radio star once I am able to move out."

Vox could only blink. At the meal, just under ten minutes ago, Alastor's father was convinced Alastor would be going into the medical field. "And your father agreed to that?"

Something in Alastor's expression darkened. A thrill went through Vox, though due to fear, or something else entirely, he couldn't say. "I tend not to care what that man thinks of me. Mama approves of it and that is all that matters."

"Alright."

And that was the end of that line of discussion.

Through the next hour Vox was permitted to stay there, he learnt that Alastor was knowledgeable about many a-thing. He could play the piano, he'd created one or two of his own radios from scratch, he knew a lot about dancing and tempos, and could identify instruments within a song, even when they were not the main focus. He did also seem to know a bit about biology.

Vox had also come to realise that Alastor had the kind of voice he could listen to over and over again. That Alastor's eyelashes were fairly long and his lips were slightly thin and he had a freckle on his lower neck.

When Vox and Alastor's mothers found the pair, they were seated on Alastor's bedroom floor while Alastor showed Vox his series of books that he highly recommended. Vox's mother had given him a pleased smile and promised he could visit Alastor again soon.

Vox couldn't help thinking that if Alastor had been a girl, he would have been teased endlessly about their friendship.

Over the course of the school year, Alastor and Vox had grown close. Vox had had friends before, but they were nothing like Alastor. They didn't have the drive or the goals or the certainty he had when he spoke about the future. Vox's other friends had never quite challenged him the way Alastor did.

One afternoon, when the pair of them were out lounging under a tree at the quiet end of the road, staring up at the reflection of light through the branches, Vox had glanced over at Alastor. His best friend lay face-up, eyes closed, his smile playing softly over his lips. Peaceful. He looked peaceful. The sunlight spilt over his face and brushed through his hair, painting the brown with shades of auburn and gold. Alastor had so many different colours in his hair when the light touched it.

Vox lay there, unblinking, taking in the soft dance of the shadows over Alastor's skin. He was sure it would be warm under his fingertips if he reached out and touched. Why he wanted to touch, he didn't know. He simply wanted to feel the tender give of someone else's skin.

Alastor's brown eyes had blinked open, and when he turned to glance at Vox, Vox felt pinned. Frozen. Alastor's irises also held an accumulation of different shades, Vox had come to realise. His cheekbones were one of his more striking features.

"What are you thinking about?" Alastor had asked in that silken voice of his. Genuine curiosity. Genuine interest in Vox's thoughts.

"How different things would be if you were a girl."

He hadn't realised the thought had occurred to him until he uttered it out loud. Shame welled up in the pit of his stomach so thickly he thought he'd be sick. Alastor only blinked.

"What would be different if I was a girl?" he asked, no judgement or disgust in his words. Only mild interest.

Vox swallowed. His eyes darted to the play of shadows over Alastor's lips. Back to his eyes. "I don't know."

Alastor had then pushed himself up so he was resting on his side with an elbow beneath to support the position. Vox's cheeks had flushed pink. This was the sort of thing he'd seen lovers do sometimes; one of them lying flat back like he was and the other tilting towards them. But Alastor was not his lover because Alastor was a boy. And Vox couldn't like boys. He wouldn't be a sinner. He didn't have anything wrong with his head.

"Do you wish I was a girl?" Alastor asked, those brown eyes piercing. "I can pretend, if you'd like that."

Vox could only blink up at his best friend, shocked. He'd heard his father talk about boys *pretending*. He'd heard the term "queer" and "pansy" spat around like they were drops of poison. His mother had chimed in with "disgusting". Vox couldn't, for the life of him, understand why Alastor would want to be all of those things.

“No,” Vox said, wondering why the thought of Alastor pretending sent his heart jackrabbiting through his chest as much as it had his skin crawling with fire ants.

“Very well, then just imagine it,” Alastor said as if it was as easy as breathing. Vox wasn’t sure if he even knew the sort of evil he was encouraging. “Imagine me donned in a fetching dress with my hair all done up. I’d even be wearing frilly gloves, how about that?”

Heat was burning in Vox’s face at the notion of such a thing. The only problem was that he couldn’t picture Alastor as a girl. Then he wouldn’t be *Alastor.* The thought of Alastor as he was now in all that was being described had Vox’s veins feeling like they were on fire. He was supposed to hate the notion, he reminded himself, not be interested in it.

“I like your hair as it is now,” Vox protested. This earned him a long, silent look from his best friend. The shame in his gut made him consider shutting up.

“Then I’d be a lass with short hair,” Alastor went on, seemingly unfazed. Vox couldn’t tell if that was better or worse than just telling him he was wicked for bringing up such a scenario in the first place. “And I’d be called Allie or something equally as pretty-sounding.”

“Al is pretty.”

Alastor tilted his head. “Al’s a nickname, Vince.”

Vox shrugged. “Still sounds pretty.”

“Alright. So, I’m Al and you’re Vince,” Alastor said. “What exactly would be different?”

Vox swallowed. If he played into this, if he encouraged this line of thought, would he be destined for an afterlife of burning alive? Would he have given his soul over to the dark forces of the other realms? Would he be considered unnatural? Wrong? Evil?

“It’s just pretend,” Alastor assured him, as if his thoughts were flickering across his face. “Like acting in a play.”

Vox swallowed. “Alright.” He licked his lips and inhaled shakily. “I’d tell you you’re pretty. Be able to mean it too.” At Alastor’s- no, *Al’s*- encouraging smile, he carried on. “I’d be able to hold your hand or touch you without it earning strange looks.”

At that, Al reached for one of Vox’s hands, twined his- *her*- slender fingers through Vox’s. Vox’s heart was pounding in his chest, slamming against his ribs again and again. He was looking up at into Al’s eyes and there was a longing deep in his chest among the jittery heart rate, among the dread and shame.

“I’d wanna-“ Vox’s voice broke. With each new thing he said, he felt as though he was bringing a number of hidden thoughts into the light. With every word, he felt more and more exposed. “-court you. When we’re older, I mean. I’d buy you whatever you wanted, any records you wanted. I’d take you out to fancy places, and dance with you. And if we did move in together, I’d get you as many books as you wanted. I’d make you your own library, Al.”

Vox felt his hand trembling in Al's, felt his eyes well with tears. There was a strange pain under his ribs that he didn't understand.

"Sounds nice," Al said, and Vox could hear in her voice she was being genuine. "I think I'd enjoy it; being courted by you. I'd keep anything you bought me."

"You would?"

"I would."

Vox was reaching up before he could stop himself. He was cupping her cheek in his palm, cradling the back of her head so tenderly. Her hair was soft. Vox ran his fingers in gentle circles where they rested simply to watch the way her eyes fluttered shut.

"Al," Vox whispered like a prayer. Those beautiful brown eyes opened and she was smiling down at him like something tender.

"Yeah?"

He hardly realised he was pulling her towards him until their noses brushed. She smelt wild. All gentle spices and soft grass, and Vox's ribs were torn open and his heart was *bleeding, aching.* He didn't think it was possible for one person to feel so much longing.

"I want to kiss you," he breathed, and the words alone felt like shards of glass at the back of his throat. "Alastor, I want to-"

And then there was the light press of lips against his, and Vox felt like he'd fallen off the edge of a jagged cliff. Alastor's lips were soft. His lips were soft and his hair was soft, and he was warm and real and Vox was *kissing a boy,* kissing *Alastor,* and he was trembling. Vox was trembling.

Because this was supposed to feel wrong. This was supposed to feel evil and disgusting and dirty, but it felt natural. How was Vox supposed to live with the fact that it felt as natural as breathing?

Alastor was pulling away and his hand was cupping Vox's cheek. He was murmuring hushed words against Vox's skin and wiping Vox's cheeks of the tears he hadn't realised he'd shed.

That night, Vox cried all through his prayers. He pleaded and begged and asked why he'd go to hell just because he wanted to be with Alastor. Just because liked his best friend who happened to be a boy.

The ceiling of his room offered no reply.

1916

The kiss wasn't mentioned again.

When Vox turned sixteen, his mother was pressed about finding him a nice girl to go out with. She claimed he needed more friends than just Alastor. He wanted to remind her that

she'd introduced the two of them, but that would imply he wasn't grateful for that introduction. Every time his mother mentioned a future partner, Vox would find a way to wrangle himself from that conversation. If his mother noticed his clear disinterest, she didn't mention it. His father didn't seem to care about marriage yet. He kept prompting Vox to focus on his schoolwork, and told him girls would come later.

Vox asked Alastor once if his parents were pressed about him settling down.

"Mama wants grandchildren, but she doesn't truly care when I have them," Alastor said. He never mentioned his father. Vox never asked about his father.

When Alastor turned eighteen, Vox had been invited to the party. It was a family gathering for Alastor; an excuse for his relatives to visit him and fawn over how much he'd grown. Vox watched multiple of these interactions from the sidelines with great amusement. He also noted that not one of Alastor's dad's relatives had shown up.

When he walked off into the kitchen to get a refill of water, Alastor's mother was busy getting another type of dessert from the oven. She placed it on the stove and greeted Vox like he was her own son. Something in him warmed at the thought.

"You're having fun, yes?" she asked, a bright smile on her face. Vox nodded.

Several seconds later, Alastor was walking in and offering to help her with the dessert. Vox could see it was a desperate attempt to get away from everyone. His mother simply swatted him with a dish towel and told him to shoo. On his way out, Alastor offered Vox an exasperated smile. Vox's own smile was much more timid.

"Vince," Alastor's mother said in a tone Vox didn't recognise. He glanced at her curiously. "I know Alastor means a lot to you, but don't give him those kinds of eyes when it's not just the two of you."

Vox blinked. "Wha- Pardon?"

"Darling, I know you like him, but if you look at him so openly in public, people will talk. Maybe don't until you're both out of school and independent."

Shame welled up in Vox, all sickening and suffocating. She couldn't mean what Vox thought she meant. There was no way she knew-

"Don't look so frightened," she said with a short laugh as she started adding sauce to the dessert. "I don't care if you're like that. Just be careful with it."

Like that. She didn't care if he was "like that". She didn't care? Wasn't she supposed to be rioting? Kicking him out of her house? Demanding he never see Alastor again? Wasn't she supposed to be disgusted?

"You're not going to tell my parents, are you?" Vox asked, his voice strained. The glass of water in his hands was long forgotten. "Please don't tell them. I'll-"

"Oh, don't fuss," she said with a wave of her hand. "I'm not like that, honey."

Vox's heartbeat was thundering in his ears and he wanted to get out. He needed to get some fresh air because what in heaven and hell was happening?

"How long have you-"

"Long enough." She looked at him and sighed softly. Her steps were light when she walked over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. "I see I've scared you. I'm sorry about that. Go enjoy the party, okay?"

Vox nodded and stumbled out of the room, leaving the glass of water behind. There were so many people. So much noise. He needed to get out, get out, *get out-*

"Vince."

Alastor was walking next to him, but he didn't reply. Alastor didn't ask. They made their way outside to the back garden. There were still so many people out here. How big was Alastor's family? Alastor led Vox around the house to the quieter part where no one went. There was a little flower garden here enclosed by fences. Herbs grew on racks along the house wall. Trees sheltered it from the view of the street.

When Vox and Alastor were sitting before each other on the paving stones in the centre of the flower bed, Vox was left staring at the crumbs of dirt on the grey patterning. His rib cage was closing in on his lungs and his skin was prickling uncomfortably. Dread swirled in his gut to the point that he felt nauseous. He was going to be sick. When Alastor placed a hand on his shoulder, he hated that it helped. It wasn't supposed to help.

"Your mom knows," Vox whispered into the air of the flower garden. His hands were clenching into his calves.

"About?" Alastor's voice was gentle. He was always so damn *gentle.* That was half the problem. If he was as crass and loud and pushy as the other boys Vox knew, there wouldn't be any sort of confusion.

"That I'm…" Vox swallowed. If he said the words, they'd be true. If he told Alastor the truth, he'd be everything his parents despised. "I'm not- I *can't be* queer, Al."

"Why ever not?"

Vox glanced up at his friend's face in surprise. "It's wrong."

Alastor frowned at that. "Do *you* think it's wrong?"

Something twisted in Vox's gut. He had to look away from Alastor's prodding eyes and back at the paving. "I can't…I don't get to decide what's true."

There was silence between the pair for several seconds. The chattering of other people was slightly muffled back here. A slow breeze caused the flowers around them to bob in the wind. The warm skin of Alastor's hand reached out and cupped Vox's chin. His head was tilted up.

“Does it feel wrong?” Alastor asked, eyebrows furrowed. His thumb brushed against Vox’s jawline in smooth swipes. Vox leaned into the contact.

“It should.”

“But does it?”

“I’m going to hell.”

“Vince.” Alastor’s fingers squeezed his chin lightly. “How does it *feel,* to you?”

Vox’s eyes closed against the honesty of what he felt. Because it wasn’t right. It wasn’t what he should feel. He shouldn’t be entertaining this at all.

Terrifying, he wanted to say. “Nice,” he breathed instead.

Alastor’s thumb resumed its brushes. “Would it feel better if I was Al?”

You are Al, Vox wanted to say, because Al was really just a nickname and not some great distinction of character. But he knew what Alastor meant.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you wish to imagine it?”

Vox frowned at the thought. “No.”

“Does it not help?”

Vox blinked open his eyes and looked at Alastor. The red shirt he was wearing for his celebration looked good on him. Red had always been Alastor’s colour. “It’s not real.”

Alastor tilted his head. His hair was being brushed though by the wind, along with the flowers. Vox thought that, if Alastor was a flower, he’d be a dahlia. “Exactly. If it’s not real, it doesn’t count. You can go to hell for something you didn’t do.”

Vox knew bullshit when he heard it, but even still, he wanted Alastor. He wanted his best friend more than he thought it possible to want anyone. And so, he was willing to take bullshit excuses.

“Alright.”

The second time they kissed, it was with the scent of flower petals and the press of a breeze against their skin.

Still 1916

Liking boys, Vox had come to realise, was confusing. Unnecessarily so. Not that he liked boys in general. Not that he liked anyone in general, aside from Alastor. Liking *Alastor* was the easy part. Alastor being a boy, was the confusing part.

The kissing helped nothing.

It shouldn't be confusing, Vox told himself as he lay awake at night overthinking it. It really shouldn't be.

He knew he liked girls. Girls were pretty and endearing, and the thought of marrying one was…nice. Of course, there was that pain in his chest too, but that wasn't because his imaginary future partner was a woman, but because she wasn't *Alastor*.

Vox ran a hand over his face. Did him liking Alastor mean he liked all boys? He didn't think that was what it meant. When he tried to picture a wider, flatter, firmer frame beside him or above him, he felt no kind of attraction to it. He'd even imagined kissing some of the other boys in his class and he'd only gagged at the phantom sensation.

But if Vox didn't like boys the same way he liked girls, what made Alastor different? Why wasn't he repulsed by his best friend when they kissed? Why was Alastor's sex an afterthought?

It was frustrating because he *didn't understand*.

That night, he didn't cry when he said his prayers, but he came close to it.

1917

After Alastor finished his school year, he moved. Not far; just a few blocks down, but far enough so he could have breathing room from his father. Far enough to be closer to his place of work too.

When Alastor had first bought the place from some money his mother had saved for him over the years, he'd shown her first. And then, after she'd left, he'd brought Vox over. If Vox's mother thought it was strange; the way Alastor and Vox had seemingly gotten closer, she only gave him an odd look before telling him to stay safe. Vox had slammed the front door on the way out. He felt in his gut that she'd seen right through him.

The bike ride with Alastor was nice. It was a peaceful evening, and Vox could soak in the atmosphere as the wind brushed through his hair. The ride happened in silence. Comfortable silence. The best kind of silence. Alastor helped Vox park his bike out to the side of the house.

It was a wooden building. Alastor went on about a bayou that was nearby. He promised he'd take Vox there in the daylight so they wouldn't run into crocodiles. The three stairs creaked as Vox and Alastor walked up them to the front door. The keys jangled from Alastor's hands, and Vox wondered how lovely it would be to have such freedom within his reach. To be able to taste it, to roll it around on his tongue.

The interior of the house was sparse with pale green wallpaper. The lounge had a singular table and two chairs. The kitchen only had the built in compartment available. And a kettle. Alastor filled it up and switched it on.

“So, what do you think?” he asked Vox, turning around and leaning back against a counter. That only caused his black shirt to cling to the contours of his chest and arms. Vox’s gaze darted back to his face.

“It’s…very you.”

Alastor’s grin widened. “Thank you.”

The gentle rumbling of the kettle filled the air between them. Vox decided Alastor was too far away and so he walked over. Alastor watched the motion with vague amusement. When Vox butted his head against Alastor’s chest like a cat asking for head pats, Alastor wrapped both arms around him and tugged him close. Vox fit under his chin perfectly. He tilted his head so his forehead was tucked against the safe warmth of the underside of Alastor’s chin. One of Alastor’s hands was running gently over his back.

“You’re not going to forget me, are you?” Vox asked softly into the fabric of his shirt. “Now that you’re-“

“Vince,” Alastor said, a laugh tinting the word. One hand reached up to tangle into the hair at the back of Vox’s skull and he caressed the scalp in the way he knew would make Vox practically melt. “My dear-“ Alastor’s voice held that gentle lilt to it reserved solely for when they were alone. “-of course not.”

Vox had to lean back slightly, to look Alastor in the eye. He had to see if he was being lied to, being fed sweet words that held no weight. Alastor’s brown eyes were unguarded. Honest.

“Tell me again,” Vox said firmly. Alastor’s smile turned fond.

“I will not- could never forget you.”

“Good.”

Vox rose onto his toes to press a soft kiss to the skin of Alastor’s throat. It was warm and soft. He pressed his nose against it next, and simply let himself be held.

The kettle turned off with a click. Alastor was humming something soft and the feel of the vibrations against Vox was soothing. Comforting. His chest ached with the fondness of it.

Too soon, Alastor was stepping away and asking if he wanted tea, and Vox was watching the way he moved. Alastor had been holding so much tension in his spine and shoulders at his old house that Vox hadn’t even noticed. He noticed it now; how free Alastor looked. He loved the sight of it, but a part of him filled with dread.

Alastor was a fox free of its cage. Vox was a chained dove, aching for the blue of the sky above.

How long would Alastor wait for him to be freed? How long would the fox journey back and forth before he grew tired of the same scents that plagued the grass around the chain? How long would Alastor trace circles into the ground before he grew bored and left Vox alone? Left Vox to break away and fly off, completely on his own?

Alastor said something about Vox thinking too much while he handed him the mug. Vox batted him in the arm which led to a sizeable amount of the tea dripping onto Alastor's fingers and the floor. Alastor simply winced as he placed Vox's mug on the countertop. Vox was giggling as he wiped up the mess which in turn made Alastor chuckle as his head shook.

And it was good. This domestic thing they had going on was good.

But Vox felt like he was standing before a ticking time bomb. He felt that he was watching the moment play out as if it was already a memory. Nostalgia was seeping under his rib cage like a sickening twist of reality.

The moment hadn't even ended and he was already grieving it.

That night, after Vox went home, his mother was waiting for him in his room. His pulse jackrabbited at the sight of her just sitting there, on his bed, as if it was a usual occurrence. As if this was a normal thing they did.

When she turned to look at him, there was something behind her eyes that had Vox wanting to run. His skin was begging to be torn off his body and whatever food he'd eaten was clawing at the back of his throat.

He swallowed. "Hi, Mom."

"Vincent," she said in acknowledgement, but her voice sounded cold. Strange. Vox was going to be sick. "I think we need to talk."

Vox was hovering in the doorway when she patted the space beside her. His veins were burning. His veins were being burnt apart and his skin was crawling with fire ants and *he was going to be sick.*

"About?"

The word was careful, guarded. He walked over to the chair of his desk opposite the bed and sat there instead. Because at least he had some kind of distance from her then. At least, if he needed to, he could flee.

"Alastor," his mom said. And he swore he felt his heart stop. "I think it's great that you have such a close friend, honey. That's great. I just…"

Vox couldn't look at her. He could hear the way her nails were picking at her clothes, but he couldn't look at her. He was going to be sick.

"I don't think he's the best influence on you."

Vox stopped breathing. "Why?"

She was hesitating. Oh, no, she was *hesitating. "*Well, you seem to be spending an awful lot of time with him, honey. He's got his own place now. I think you should give him some space to grow."

To move on. To forget about you. “No.” It was firmer than he would have liked, but she couldn’t ask something like that of him. “No.”

“Vincent, I’m trying to-“ She inhaled and then her voice gained a harder edge to it. “I don’t like how close the two of you are.”

Ah. “He’s my best friend.”

“He’s also eighteen, Vincent. You’re sixteen. It’s time to grow up a little. Being that close with another boy is alright when you’re a child, but neither of you are children anymore.” Vox hated when she got like this. “It’s not natural.”

Again with that word. Again with the poison in her voice like it was a sin to simply exist the way he was. To her, he supposed, it was.

“I don’t care.”

“Do you care for him?”

Vox’s heart leapt into his throat. There was a faint ringing in his ears and his fingers were clenching onto the edge of his desk. “What?”

“Do you *care* for him?”

She’d asked the question as if she’d been spitting out glass.

“What does that matter?” Vox asked, and then there was quiet. The sort of quiet before a lioness pounced onto an antelope. The sort of quiet before the scream in a horror film. The sort of quiet that had Vox’s gut churning. He needed to get out of his skin.

“You don’t,” she said softly, her words the silken drapery over fangs of venom. “Vincent, tell me you don’t.”

Vox’s throat was clogged with sickened dread. He couldn’t speak. He couldn’t *breathe.* He couldn’t feel the tips of his fingers.

“Vincent-“

“I don’t.” He forced the words out, almost choked on them. He didn’t believe them. He doubted she would either. They were a lie. A blatant lie.

There was silence again after that. Though, his heart was thundering in his chest so he couldn’t describe what sort it was this time.

“Have you prayed about this?”

Vox closed his eyes. He’d done nothing but pray about it. Over and over and over again. “Of course.”

“Then you would see how absolutely *wrong* it is.”

“I know.” Vox’s voice held no emotion where his mother’s was full of it.

“Vince.” She was speaking gentler now. The edge was taken off her words, replaced with tears. He could hear then in the waver when she spoke and he didn’t know if that was better or worse. “The devil is a dying enemy. But while he’s dying, he’s trying to drag as many people down with him as he can, and *I can’t* have you fall down too.”

Vox’s chest was rolling with dread. He needed to rip out his organs. He needed to cut open his torso to let it roll out of him in thick clouds.

“I can’t have you seeing Alastor if this is the sort of nonsense he pollutes your mind with.”

“He doesn’t!” Vox blinked open his eyes in alarm. He finally looked at his mother to see her eyes wide and tearing up. He wanted to slit his own throat and be done with it. Be done with all of this. “He doesn’t-“ It was a last ditch attempt to get her to to leave Alastor out of this. “-know. He doesn’t know. I haven’t told him.”

He felt her eyes boring into him, drilling holes through the very core of himself. He forced himself to bear it, forced himself to let her see it as truth.

Finally, her expression relaxed. “You won’t tell him.” A demand.

“I won’t.” A half truth.

“You’re going to move on from this.”

“Yes.” A complete lie.

“Does anyone else know about…this?”

Alastor’s mom knew. She didn’t care. “No.”

“Good. Keep it that way.” His mother rose from the bed and walked over to him. He wanted to die. “This is just the way it has to be, Vince. That’s not right. I refuse to stand back and watch you throw your soul away.”

Vox *wanted to die.*

“He’ll forgive you. Just pray about it some more.” She was talking about God, because of course she was. Vox wanted to claw his soul from his body and be rid of it. “I can take you to the church to-“

“No.” Vox’s voice was firm. His mother paused before conceding.

“You need to spend less time with Alastor.”

Vox refused to reply to that. He couldn’t.

His mother left the room and shut the door behind her. Vox couldn’t even look at his bed, couldn’t sleep on something she’d desecrated.

Fuck, he was terrified. He was terrified of dying and heaven and hell. Terrified of the day God would look down on him and deem him to eternal punishment. He was fucking *terrified.*

Because, no matter what Alastor said, he was sure God was real. He'd had supernatural experiences in his youth that he couldn't just deem his imagination. He'd felt things deeper than emotions, deeper than mental things. He'd felt things in his soul. He was sure he had a soul, sure that it must be blackened and charred, and he sunk to the the floor of his bedroom.

He couldn't have both. He'd been warned multiple times that he couldn't have Alastor and be a "good Christian". It wouldn't be right or honest or faithful of him to take a man as his partner. But he was sixteen. Sixteen was too young to think about death and afterlife. But he could also die tomorrow. And if he died tomorrow, he'd be burning alive.

Vox curled up into a ball on the floor and hugged his knees to his chest. More than anything in the world, he wanted Alastor.

After that night, Vox avoided his mother. He avoided everyone entirely, actually. Alastor came over several times in the week, but each time his mom would tell Alastor he was out. Or at school, trying out a new sport. Alastor's patience didn't dwindle like Vox thought it would. It didn't stop just because he stopped showing up.

He hated himself for it. He hated himself. He also wanted to kill himself any way possible. He'd taken to sinking his nails into his calves until it stung. He'd taken to pressing a blunt blade to the skin of his thighs until he felt the sweet, sweet wave of euphoria rush over him without having to deal with the blood. He wanted out of his own body. He wanted *out.* This physical thing that he was was simply a prison and he wanted to *get out.*

Vox had taken to running. He'd taken to doing something with his body that had his legs burning and his chest heaving and had him feeling alive. He'd also taken to cycling. He'd skirted around Alastor's house, but hadn't gone into the yard. Hadn't ventured inside. He wondered about the bayou Alastor had talked about. So many times, he'd wanted to visit it. So many times, he'd turned back.

It was after two weeks of avoidance that Alastor finally caught him off-guard.

Vox was out in the street, running towards the familiar location of Alastor's house, when the light even steps of another person joined his own. When he glanced to his side, face sweaty, lungs breathless, he stumbled. Alastor caught him with a light laugh and the two slowed to a walk.

"Hello," Alastor said, his grin cheerful. Vox needed to keep running. He was going to be sick if he stopped. He was going to be sick.

"You can't be here."

"So, something did happen. I thought you were acting rather suspicious."

"Alastor." Vox was tearing up. He couldn't do this. "You need to leave."

“No, I don’t believe I do. You’re closer to my house than your own. I can’t be made to be trespassing on public property.”

“Then I’ll leave.” Vox was already picking up his pace. Alastor grabbed his forearm. Vox wanted to cry. There was a weight in his chest and he couldn’t breathe. It had nothing to do with his run. “Let me go.”

“Come home with me.”

Vox blinked, eyes shooting up to Alastor’s in surprise. His best friend plowed ahead.

“Just talk to me, Vince. Please.”

Alastor didn’t say please. Not to anyone but his mother. Maybe it was that one word that made Vox cave in. Maybe it was the look on Alastor’s face. Whatever the reason, he found himself at Alastor’s place with a knot in his stomach and his sweaty shirt clinging to his back and chest.

Vox sat at the table, downing a bottle of water, while Alastor dished a muffin onto a plate for him. The fridge was new.

“Your mother said something to you,” Alastor said, his back still turned to Vox. There was a tension in his shoulders that had Vox wanting to walk over there, to soothe it away. He set his water bottle down.

“Something like that,” Vox replied.

“About me?”

“Yes.”

Alastor was turning around and walking towards him. He set the plate before Vox with a clink. And then he was heading back to the counter in the kitchen to prepare tea.

“She forbade you from seeing me?”

Vox pulled the plate towards him, broke a piece off the muffin. “Not exactly.” He lifted it to his mouth, chewed and swallowed. Chocolate chip. “She knows that I…” He broke another piece off, twisted it in his finger. “She told me to pray about it. She doesn’t think you know.”

Alastor was turning around with an expression Vox hadn’t often seen on his face. Raised eyebrows, a faint smile on his lips as if he wasn’t sure that teasing was the right path to take. Vox himself didn’t know.

“She told me not to see you as much,” Vox said before he tossed that piece into his mouth too.

The sound of water being poured into cups filled the lack of talking. There was the gentle clinking of a teaspoon.

“And you listened to her?” Alastor’s voice sounded strange. Strained, wounded. Vox hated himself a little more for that.

“She’s my mom.”

“I know.”

And Alastor *did* know. Because his mother was his entire world. Vox’s mother was more of a large planet to him, but he still cared about her opinion. He still cared about her. A whole load of things would have been easier if he didn’t.

“And when you move out?” Alastor asked, voice low. Vox frowned.

“What about that?”

He watched Alastor’s face fall just so and felt something inside himself break a little. Shit.

“I thought you said you didn’t want me to forget you.” Alastor’s expression was open and honest and Vox wanted to shy away from it, but he owed Alastor just this much.

“I don’t. I just…” He clamped his jaw. Glanced at the muffin. Inhaled. Tried again. “I just can’t have her-“ He felt his eyes fill with tears again. He was so pathetic, willing to cry about everything these days. “I’m *terrified*, Alastor.” His voice didn’t sound like his own. “I know you don’t believe the things I do, but I’m so fucking terrified, because I *can’t be queer.* I’m not like you. I can’t just decide to think He isn’t real and that we’ll all fade to oblivion when we die. I would love to believe that. Really, I would, but I can’t.”

Alastor had moved in the span Vox had been talking. He was crouched before Vox, looking up at him. A hand was on Vox’s knee. Another was reaching for his face. Vox should be pulling away, should be telling him to piss off, but- *fuck*- he was tired. He was tired of thinking, of feeling. He was *so fucking tired.*

He leaned into the contact and felt his veins burn.

His mother would hate him right now. His father wouldn’t be quite as merciful.

Vox shut his eyes as a sob escaped his lips. He wanted to die. He wanted Alastor. A warm tear drop rolled down his cheek. There was a gentle touch to brush it away.

“Does that mean,” Alastor said softly, “that you don’t want to continue this?”

Vox blinked. “I…Maybe. Just- just until I figure things out.”

Alastor withdrew his hand from Vox’s face and Vox couldn’t suppress the small wounded sound that left his lips. He grasped Alastor’s hand.

“Tomorrow,” Vox breathed, holding Alastor’s hand in his and pressing both of his thumbs into the palm of it. “Please. It- We can stop tomorrow, just- *please.*”

He was looking up at Alastor's face, all wide eyes. There was a crease between Alastor's brows that he wasn't sure how to interpret. But then Alastor's expression was relaxing into something almost pained. And Vox got it, truly he did, but he wished he could take it back all the same.

"Alright," Alastor said, something unreadable in his voice. "Come then, let me cherish today."

Vox was tugged to his feet.

"I'm sweaty," he said, with his nose wrinkling. He knew he smelt a mess, and why Alastor was still touching him, he couldn't understand.

"I don't care."

Alastor tugged Vox closer. His hands were on Vox's hips and he was humming something. Some soft tune Vox had heard on his lips once or twice before. Vox leaned forward and rested his forehead against Alastor's shoulder. One of Alastor's hands tangled into his hair.

As they swayed together, there in the kitchen, a sort of bittersweet agony bled through Vox's chest cavity. The dampness on Alastor's shirt could simply be attested to his sweat.

Alastor stopped coming over after that.

Chapter End Notes

Personal headcanon: they're both ace

PS. Good Luck Babe! was playing in my head repeatedly while I wrote this (namely the third verse)

Chapter 2: It’s a sexually explicit kind of love affair

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1918

During his final year of school, Vox poured himself into his work. It was his only solace, his only place of comfort. At school, he was exhausted. In every way possible. At home, he was uneasy. Anxious. Unsettled.

His parents had taken to fighting. Every day. His dad had never really been home since he turned ten and it showed. Trying to worm his way back into Vox’s life now that Vox was so close to leaving, so close to the vast blue sky that he could almost *taste* it, was unacceptable. His mom told him to be grateful his father was even trying at all.

The only problem with his place of comfort- his work- was the fact that he was prone to burn outs. He was prone to disappointing himself. He worked himself to the bone to ensure that he would be good enough, as if scoring the highest marks would somehow make up for everything else he lacked. As if good marks made up for still liking Alastor.

The mornings before tests were spent in the school bathrooms trying to remember how to breathe. The afternoons were tainted with numb acceptance.

So many days, Vox spent on the floor of his room, staring at the ceiling and wondering what Alastor was up to. He’d seen him once or twice since that afternoon they’d spent together. Mostly just at family dinners. He could feel his mom’s eyes boring into his skull the whole time. He wasn’t permitted to go off with Alastor alone like he had been that night they’d met. It was an irrational fear she had. Vox had given up trying to understand it.

As the final exams of the year approached, Vox could feel himself running on fumes. When he placed his pen down for the last time, he didn’t even feel excited. Only a dull sort of sensation. And then the familiar tang of anxiety eating away at his stomach.

He’d only get these marks at the start of the new year.

It was after the final exams that his school had arranged a dance. Vox had decided long before hand he wouldn’t be going. A week before the event, his mother had other plans. She’d come home, all bright smiles and genuine excitement in her eyes, to find him in his room. Vox shied away from her. Too bright. She was too bright like this.

“I bought you something!”

As if Vox couldn’t see the navy suit in her hands. She draped it over his chair, still talking. Vox really did not want to listen. He really didn’t, but she was being nice. She was being nice and he supposed he would be an asshole if he ignored her. He knew his dad did enough of that already.

“I was talking to one of the moms at the prayer group,” she was going on, “and she has a daughter who is just dying to go to this dance, but she doesn’t have a partner. I thought it would be so nice of you to go with her! She’s going in a pretty blue dress so I got this so the two of you can match.”

Vox didn’t even have it in him anymore to fight. He didn’t have the energy to be angry at her.

“Alright.”

Vox’s mother paused for a second before carrying on. Vox bore it just until she was done and out of the door. As soon as it shut behind her, he was slumping back onto his bed and pressing the palms of his hands to his eyes. He wanted to cry. He wanted to scream. But he was so tired.

He dropped his hands to the duvet and just blinked up at the ceiling. There was a swirling mess of emotions in his chest, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

Faintly, in the back of his mind, he thought about Alastor in a pretty blue dress. The right shade of blue would look lovely on him. And then Vox was closing his eyes against the thoughts.

It had been a year. A whole year since him and Alastor had been whatever they used to be. He wasn’t even sure if Alastor wanted him anymore. Did Alastor want him anymore? Had he moved on, despite what he’d told Vox? Had he forgotten Vox? Was Vox nothing more than some blip in his teenage years?

Vox let out a long breath. Right. Alastor was twenty now. That was an odd thought. He’d missed the party this year. Alastor’s mom probably hated him. It would be deserved.

In the week leading up to the dance, Vox’s mother was flitting over him as a way to distract herself from her argument with her husband. What they’d even argued about this time, Vox didn’t know or care.

Multiple times that week, he’d considered going to Alastor’s place to talk. Multiple times he’d talked himself out of it.

The night of the dance, Vox annoyingly felt nervous. He shouldn’t be. He just hated that this girl may have expectations about him or tonight. He didn’t know what his mother had told her or her mother.

They met up at the school. His mother walked him to the gate and, when she saw the mother of the girl, her face lit up. Vox followed her gaze.

Well, she was certainly pretty. Her blonde hair was done up into a bun and the dress did look good on her. When she was a few steps away from Vox, she offered him a polite smile.

“Vincent, this is Rosie,” his mother said. She had this look, this hopeful spark in her eyes, that Vox chose to ignore. “Rosie, this is Vincent.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” Rosie said.

“You too.”

They made their way inside after his mother fussed a little more. Rosie had a floral hairpin to the side of her head that Vox decided to compliment. She complimented him on his tie in return.

Overall, the night was not bad. The event started out with the lot of them getting food; some cold salad dish the school had ordered. Only after the food did the music kick up. The dancing itself was nice. Rosie wasn’t touchy or overtly flirting with him. Her smiles were polite, not shy, and the shine in her eyes was genuine excitement, not anything romantically inclined. Relief swept through Vox. Thank goodness, this had not turned into some sort of blind date.

It was only after the dance, when Vox was walking her home, that she’d confessed she’d been worried about the same thing.

“My mother’s been so adamant about me finding a boy to date recently,” Rosie said with a roll of her eyes. “She made me join our local youth group so I’d have more exposure to them or something of that sort. As if that was the problem.” Rosie shook her head. “I’ve been going to this school for five years, and I met Eve though it. Exposure is not the problem.”

Vox blinked and glanced down at Rosie. “Eve?”

“Evelyn,” she said, as if that would clear something up. “My partner.”

It took Vox approximately five seconds to think that, *huh, Evelyn sounded more like a woman’s name than a man’s*. It took him another three seconds to factor in the way Rosie was looking at him, almost…expectantly? And then another two seconds for it to click.

“Oh,” Vox said eloquently. “Oh.”

Rosie only laughed. “A better reaction than my mother’s, I suppose.”

Memory of how to use the English language slammed back into Vox’s mind. “Oh, no, no, I didn’t mean it like that, I just-“

“Oh, hush, darling, I know,” she said with a wave of her hand and a genuine laugh. “I was only teasing.”

“Right.”

Vox’s heart was thrumming. Why was she…trusting him like this? He hadn’t told anyone he and Alastor were more than simple friends. Everyone involved had seemingly figured it out on their own.

“Oh, don’t look so worried. I only told you because you don’t seem like the type to call eternal damnation upon me.” She wrinkled her nose. “Or make any vulgar remarks on the subject.”

Vox didn't know how to take that. "I mean…aren't you afraid of that?"

Rosie straightened the skirt of her dress. The pair's footsteps sounded on the pavement. There was thankfully no chill in the air tonight.

"Of damnation? I suppose I am. But I can't help who I've fallen in love with, can I? Besides, I've known I fancied women and men since I was young. It's not as if I tugged a lever one day and decided to find them attractive."

Vox nodded. His parents had always spoken about liking the same sex as if it were a choice, as if people had grown bored and decided being queer would be a nice change. He'd never understood that view because he didn't choose to like Alastor. In fact, he actively tried *not* to like Alastor. His attempts remained unsuccessful.

"So, from where I'm standing, if I go to hell for simply loving someone else-" Rosie shook her head. "Well, then heaven doesn't seem all that it's made to be, does it?"

Something in Vox's chest ached at those words. *Blasphemous,* his brain supplied in a voice eerily similar to his mother's, *such thoughts were blasphemous.*

As Vox was walking back to his house, after he'd dropped her off, his mind would not stop running in circles. His thoughts tripped over themselves again and again, he needed them gone. He wanted them gone.

He didn't want to go home. At this point, he couldn't even call it that. It was a house that held his parents, that held the haunting memories of the life he'd lived so far. It was a graveyard. Tombstones littered the building. He didn't want to go back there. Not yet. Not when his mother would come to the door, all bright eyed and big smiles, and ask how it was. Not when he'd have to kill that bit of hope she held.

Alastor. He wanted Alastor.

His legs were moving before he processed where they were taking him.

The garden was still pretty much the same. There was still a bike parked out against the porch railing. Vox made it up those three wooden steps to the front door and knocked loudly before his brain caught up with him.

Wait.

What was he doing? What was he *doing*? It had been a whole year, and now he was showing up like he'd never left. Like he hadn't had the worst fucking year of his life.

"Vince?"

Vox froze, spinning around so his back faced the door. His skin was pricking with thousands of tiny honeybee stings. Alastor was out in the garden, several paces from Vox. His brows were furrowed and his weight was distributed mainly onto his left foot as if he'd stopped mid-walk.

“Alastor,” Vox breathed. Something clogged the back of his throat. He swallowed. “I…Do you want to talk? I- I’m ready. It’s sorted.”

Alastor blinked. He looked stunning in the moonlight. His hair was ruffled and his shirt was slightly torn. “Alright.”

He walked past Vox to the door and the pair stepped inside. Alastor smelt of broken leaves and earth. Vox wondered if he’d been to the bayou.

“Would you like anything to drink, my good man?” Alastor asked as he walked towards the kitchen. Vox kicked off his shoes and hovered awkwardly, unsure of where to sit. “I’ve got tea, coffee, water, whiskey.” He turned around and gestured broadly. “Take your pick.”

Okay…well, the whiskey was new.

“I’m okay, Al, I just want to talk.”

Alastor paused at that. And then he was making his way over to the newest addition of furniture; a couch. It was a two-seater propped against a wall with several picture frames hanging behind it.

“Well, then, let’s talk!”

He gestured to the space beside him. Vox hesitated before making his way over and sitting down. He didn’t look at Alastor.

“Okay.” He was interlacing his fingers. Squeezing his palm to have something to do with his hands. “Okay, I-“ Weight was crushing his lungs, but he could do this. “I…want to be with you. If- if that’s still something you want?”

Silence. There was silence. Oh, fuck, there was silence. He’d probably come on too strong. Shit.

“If you don’t, that’s okay too. It’s just that…I’ve tried to get over you this year. I thought that maybe if I did, maybe if I could, then it would mean I was just…delusional or-“

He winced at the words his mother had uttered *“You’re a boy, Vincent. It’s just the hormones.”*

“-it was just a phase I was going through,” he continued. “But I…I can’t. And it drives me crazy because I should get to get over you if I wanted.” He was rambling. He was rambling and Alastor was still silent. “But, um, obviously, it’s probably insensitive to come back here after everything and just-“

“You would like to be with me?” Alastor’s voice was soft.

Vox snapped his gaze to meet Alastor’s eyes. He studied the intricate browns and vivid chestnuts of his iris. Some of the prickling calmed while he studied those eyes. Alastor’s hair was a little longer than the last time Vox had seen him.

“Yes.” It was the most honest thing he’d told anyone the entirety of the past year. “I do.”

“As I am?” *Not as Al?*

“Yes.” Vox’s chest ached at the hesitation in Alastor’s words. “Just as you are. Just you.”

Alastor turned his face away and Vox heard the shaky exhale, saw the slight tremor that washed over Alastor as he buried his face in his hands. He wanted to reach out, but he hadn’t been given a clear answer.

They simply existed like that for a minute; breathing together in a suspended limbo.

“Do you mean it?” Alastor hadn’t lifted his head from his hands.

“I mean it.”

Another, longer, exhale. Alastor didn’t cry. He simply *didn’t.* This was the closest thing he would ever get to it.

When Alastor was lifting his head and looking at Vox, there was something shining in his eyes and Vox was opening his mouth to ask about it when Alastor was reaching for him. Warm fingers were snaking through the strands of his hair and gripping. And then Alastor was leaning forward to press his forehead against Vox’s.

Vox blinked, stunned into silence. After several seconds, he closed his eyes and savoured the warm sensation. It felt like understanding. It felt like healing.

“I thought you would never,” Alastor said. His fingers caressed gentle circles into Vox’s scalp; soothing balm to the sting under his skin. “I was quite sure your mother had forbade you from seeing me altogether.”

Dread swirled in Vox’s stomach. He was the first to pull away, to drawn in on himself as if he could make himself smaller. “And your mom?” His voice was a fragile thing. He couldn’t bring himself to vocalise the worry that plagued his mind; *does she hate me? Has she forgiven me for what I put you through?*

“Mama understands the view your parents hold. My father is the same way inclined. She understands how such things, like religion, can hold a vice grip over people.” Alastor’s hand moved from Vox’s hair to the side of his face. “She doesn’t hold it against you.”

Vox let out a shaky breath. Tears brimmed his eyes and he blinked them away.

“I don’t hold it against you.”

Something like warmth was flooding Vox’s chest, pouring over the dread like a healing balm. A genuine sob escaped him then, and he was being pulled towards Alastor, tugged onto his lap. Slender, but strong arms wrapped around his body and he buried his face in the crook of Alastor’s neck.

“I’ve got you,” Alastor whispered. “You’re safe here. I have you.”

They stayed like that for minutes until Vox's ragged breathing returned to normal, until the tears stopped. The burn under his skin was nothing more than a whisper.

"Sorry," he said, leaning back and wiping his eyes against the sleeves of his suit. His gaze trailed back to Alastor's shirt and he saw the damp patch he'd left behind. "Shit! Sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"Oh, calm down," Alastor said, with a playful roll of his eyes. "This shirt is hardly in pristine condition."

"I suppose," Vox said, and there was something in Alastor's face that shifted.

"You seem rather skittish, my dear." His hands were on Vox's waist, beneath his overcoat, and they were warm. Vox's arms were draped over his shoulders. If anyone were to walk in, Vox supposed they would think the two were on their way to fornication.

"Skittish?"

"Yes. You've been shy in the past, but you were never quite so eager to shrink yourself down." A beat passed in which Vox thought, *oh,* Alastor could still very much see through him. "Do tell me if I'm making things up, Vince."

"No, no, you're right. It's- I'm-" He took to studying the slope of Alastor's throat. So flawless. He wanted to press a kiss to the skin there just to feel the pulse of a heartbeat beneath his lips. "It's just easier sometimes, I suppose."

"To shrink?"

Vox nodded mutely. Alastor hummed, absently running his hands over Vox's sides, over the front of his shirt.

"You know I would never ask you to do that, do you not?" When Vox looked back at Alastor's eyes, they held a level of sincerity he hadn't seen in a while. "You're quite fascinating, just as you are."

A small smile flickered across Vox's lips. "Thank you."

A matching one crept across Alastor's. "You're very welcome." A beat. Another. "Do tell me that the suit is not for me. I'm afraid that bit of information would cause this conversation to feel like a business transaction."

"No, no, we had a dance tonight. The school. It was okay. My mom made me go with this girl, but she…she's kind of the reason I came here."

Alastor snorted at that. "A high compliment, I'm sure."

Heat swarmed Vox's face. "No, not like that! She has- she *understands,* and we spoke about it."

"About you being queer?"

“Pretty much.”

“Well then, let her know I appreciate it.”

Vox rolled his eyes. “Sure.”

Alastor was lifting a hand and pressing it to the side of Vox’s face, cupping it like he was something valuable. Something precious. There was a certain look behind Alastor’s eyes that felt vulnerable. The soft muscle of Alastor’s tongue was running over his top lip and Vox’s gaze followed the motion.

“Vince, can I-“

“Yes, yes, anything, just-“

And then Alastor’s mouth was on his and he was openly groaning at the sensation because, *holy hell,* he’d missed this. He’d missed the soft press of lips on his own, the subtle give and take. His hands were sliding up to Alastor’s neck and drawing him closer, and Alastor’s hand on his waist was squeezing, tugging. Vox whined softly at the feeling. This only seemed to spur Alastor on so that he could draw more involuntary sounds from Vox’s throat.

His right hand was resting on Vox’s shoulder, his thumb pressed against the pulse point of Vox’s neck. It was a light pressure; barely even there, but the threat of it had Vox leaning against his chest against Alastor’s. The cling of his suit felt too hot, too tight, and he needed it off. He wanted it gone.

“Alastor-“ His voice was breathless. He barely recognised it as his own. His lips were brushing against Alastor’s, his breath hot. He was fumbling with the overcoat, trying to tug it off over his shoulders. “*Alastor.”*

Alastor’s hands were there, pulling, and then the coat was gone and Vox was reaching to hold Alastor’s face in his. His lips were on Alastor’s again. There was the press of a tongue against the seam of them and his fingers tightened their hold on Alastor’s neck just slightly before he opened his mouth. And then that tongue was pressing into his mouth and brushing gently over his teeth. He didn’t even attempt to fight it, perfectly content to let Alastor do what he wanted.

When Alastor’s hands moved to grip the back of his thighs, and he rose to his feet, Vox’s breath hitched. He pulled back, breathless.

“What are you-“

“It’s hardly proper to participate in such activities in a public living area, now is it?”

Alastor was walking towards the corridor past the kitchen, carrying Vox like he weighed nothing. This only served to cause butterflies to swoop through his gut.

When they reached the bedroom, Alastor closed the door and walked them both over to the bed. He sat down on the duvet. Vox’s legs were still wrapped around his waist, his arms

draped over Alastor's shoulders. Alastor leaned forward to place gentle kisses against various parts of Vox's face; his forehead, cheeks, nose. His chest felt carved open, his most vital organs on display, and yet Alastor was still gentle with him.

A smile spread over Vox's lips.

"You're a sap," Vox said, amusement tinting the words. There was a lump at the back of his throat that made his voice hoarse.

Alastor merely hummed, his lips warm and supple against Vox's jawline and then his throat. Vox tilted his head, eyes fluttering shut.

"I want to bite into you," Alastor said, the words scraping out of his throat. Vox shivered at the feel of Alastor's breath against his skin. "I want to carve you open and reside among your organs." His tongue was licking a stripe up to the shell of Vox's ear. "I want to lie between your lungs and listen to you breathe." An open mouthed kiss to the tender flesh there. "I want to wear your skin like it's my own." Alastor's fingers were unbuttoning his shirt. His lips found Vox's collarbones. "I want to blend every piece of you together and *consume* you."

Vox's head was spinning. He'd never quite heard Alastor talk like this before. It was intoxicating. It was dizzying. It was everything. His skin was being set alight with each new piece Alastor touched.

They both moved back so Alastor was lying down, head against the pillows, and Vox was straddling his lap. Brown hair looked stunning splayed out around Alastor's head. Vox dipped down to kiss him again.

There was a lot of that for a while; the kissing. Alastor was slowly working Vox's shirt off of his torso. When it was disposed of, Alastor leant forward to *bite* Vox's shoulder. Not enough to bruise or bleed, but enough for Vox to moan softly as his hips bucked involuntarily against Alastor's.

"Shit," he breathed, rising on his haunches. "Sorry, I-"

A firm hand was grasping the nape of his neck and squeezing so his words were cut off with a gasp. Alastor drew his teeth away from Vox's shoulder. His breath fanned against Vox's ear instead.

"Stop apologising." Alastor's left hand was at Vox's waist and he tugged Vox against him again. "And take what you need from me."

"I don't-" A broken moan was torn from Vox's throat as he hesitantly tried grinding his hips against Alastor's. It was uncomfortable, sure, fabric wasn't a great thing to grind sensitive skin against, but this was the first time he'd ever done something like this. "I don't want to just *take it*. I want-" Something more akin to a whimper left his lips. "Alastor, I want- Can I see you? I want to see you."

Alastor blinked up at him, something like surprise behind his eyes. "Alright."

Vox lifted himself from Alastor's lap and watched as Alastor's hands left his body to unbutton his pants and tug them off. Vox could feel his heart *pump-pump, pump-pump*ing in his chest. His hands were shaky.

Alastor tossed the pants onto the floor beside the bed. Vox was looking at his boxers, looking at the half-tent beneath them. He was almost expecting to feel disgust at the sight, almost expecting what he thought was real to come crashing down around him, but, no.

He saw Alastor's hands extent towards the waist band and reached out before he could stop himself.

"Can I?"

His gaze darted to Alastor's face, his hands hovering over Alastor's. Something like amusement quirked Alastor's lips, but he nodded. Vox swallowed, eyes fixed back on the boxers. They were black. Simple. The band of the boxers was smooth, and he hesistated for a second before tugging it down. Alastor's hips lifted to assist him.

"Oh."

Vox's eyes widened as he took in the sight of Alastor. He reached out cautiously, glancing at Alastor's face for permission which was granted in the form of another nod. He wrapped his hand around it. Warm. It was warm and smooth and slightly firm. *Pretty*, was a word that came to mind, but it never made it past his lips.

Vox shifted so he was sitting cross-legged between Alastor's legs. Both of which were bent at the knee and fanning slightly outward. Vox adored the sight of Alastor's thighs.

He tightened his grip just slightly and gave it one pump. He liked the weight of it in his hand. He pumped it again, and listened to the shaky exhale Alastor let out. A glance at Alastor's face made him note the way Alastor was propped up on his elbows to watch how Vox chose to proceed.

"Is this okay?" Vox asked.

"Of course."

His attention went back to Alastor's dick. He'd seen his own plenty of times already. There was nothing particularly fascinating about it; it was simply a protruding thing jutting out of his pelvic area.

But Alastor's…Alastor's was *interesting.* He had a little freckle along the shaft of it, and then there was the sack beneath it. Vox gently, delicately, cupped his free hand beneath it and felt the soft weight of it. Thin, wiry hairs curled from the skin there, and, before he could think twice about it, he was leaning down and planting a kiss against it. The dick in his other hand twitched at the attention.

Vox huffed out a slight laugh, releasing the sack to have both hands gently cup Alastor. He was harder now. Not hard in the way that wood or bricks were hard. It was hard in the

way that silicone mixing spoons were hard; it wasn't some obscenely intrusive thing with no sense of life.

Vox did know all of this from his own anatomy, but it was just different with someone else's.

He removed one hand from it to soothe along Alastor's hips as he focused on the feel of his fingers up and down the skin of it. Alastor moaned softly, but didn't ask anything of him. Didn't ask him to hurry up or get on with it. He let Vox take his time, let Vox explore the simplicity of *liking* the look, liking the feel of a dick that wasn't his own.

After another few jerks of his hand, a bead of slightly translucent liquid pooled at the slit. The sight had Vox leaning forward, watching with slightly wide eyes as he used a finger to smear through the liquid. He used it to coat the head and watched the way Alastor reacted to the touch.

"Holy shit, you're stunning," Vox breathed, completely enraptured by the furrow between Alastor's brows, the part of his lips. The top two buttons of his shirt were undone. He was ethereal like this.

Alastor only laughed weakly at the compliment.

Alastor was uncut, unlike him, and Vox watched as, each time he moved his hand, the extra thin layer of skin covered and then exposed the head. After three jerks in rapid succession, he drew the skin back to watch, awed, as the head throbbed and another drop of precum dripped from the slit. He was struck with an overwhelming urge to *taste.* He wanted to feel the weight of it on his tongue.

And so he was leaning forward and licking a line along the head. The taste was musky and tangy and unlike anything he'd tasted before. It wasn't particularly a flavour he'd pursue on its own, but coupled with the fact that it was making Alastor choke out a soft sound was enough for Vox to open his mouth and suck the head in.

Alastor gasped, head tilting back to expose the slope of his throat. Vox simply toyed around with the feel of it in his mouth, against his tongue for a bit before pulling off.

"Vince," Alastor breathed, his voice more of a whine than anything else. Vox snapped his gaze up to Alastor's face, heat blooming down his spine. One of Alastor's hands was grabbing fistfuls of the duvet. His chest was heaving. Vox wanted to kiss him just to taste the tang of his tongue and precum tangled into one.

"Yes?"

"You're going to be the death of me."

Vox simply smiled at that. He released Alastor's dick, watching the way it bobbed up just over his stomach. A small sound left Alastor's lips. Vox pushed some of Alastor's shirt out of the way so it wouldn't get completely desecrated.

“You’re beautiful,” Vox whispered, running both his hands over the small slip of Alastor’s stomach that was exposed.

As a teenager, Alastor had been gangly, like a fawn that hadn’t yet grown into its legs. He was still bony, still long limbs and slender, but his shoulders were broader. His body had lost that sense of awkwardness it had held in its youth. Vox hadn’t really noticed it until it was gone.

Vox’s hands traced over Alastor’s hipbones, over his inner thighs. The skin was so soft here. Vox leant forward to nuzzle against it, breathing in the scent of it. Alastor huffed out an amused laugh.

“Having fun, are we?” he asked, head tilted slightly. Vox rubbed his cheek against the meat of his inner thighs and blinked up at Alastor.

“Yes.”

He planted soft kisses along the skin there before moving up to the hipbones and wrapped his hands around Alastor’s waist. It was slender enough that, if he had a third hand, he could completely cover it. Awe flooded his chest at the sight.

“Can I try something?” Vox asked, eyeing the small pool of the slimy substance at Alastor’s navel.

“Go for it.”

Vox tugged off his own pants and boxers and tossed them aside. His underwear had acquired a damp patch, his own anatomy very much interested in the current proceedings.

He straddled Alastor’s waist, and grasped his dick in his right hand and Alastor’s in his left. The slide of silken skin against silken skin was divine, and both Vox and Alastor let out soft sounds at the feel of it. Alastor’s elbows slipped out from under him. His head bounced against the pillow. One of his hands came up to replace one of Vox’s, and their fingers twined together.

It was a little messy, but Vox loved the faces it tugged from Alastor. He loved watching Alastor’s expressions, hearing the desperate sounds dripping from his lips. The pleasure and arousal he experienced were second hand benefits.

It lasted for a while; the gentle grind of his hips. The room was filled with the sound of slickness, the quiet gasps and moans and grunts shared between the two. Vox would occasionally murmur something about Alastor which would draw out soft sounds from him.

And then Alastor was whining something high pitched, and his body was tensing and his eyes were rolling in his skull, and Vox thought it was the closest view of heaven he’d ever get.

Later, when they were both cleaned up and lying in bed under the covers, Vox was cuddled against Alastor’s side. Their bare legs were intertwined. Vox thought the feel of Alastor’s skin on his was something sacred.

“I’m queer,” Vox whispered against the fresh shirt Alastor had donned.

A soft laugh escaped Alastor’s lips and a warm hand was stroking through his hair. “That’s the take away?”

“Mm.” Vox lifted a hand to trace the features of Alastor’s face. He was relaxed like this. Boneless. Fondness seeped through Vox’s chest. “Another take away is that you’re beautiful.”

Alastor glanced at Vox, eyes swimming with something so deep that Vox’s breath hitched. “Is that so?”

“Yes,” Vox said, his voice a whisper. He traced the upturn of Alastor’s nose as something like grief clambered under his rib cage. “And I missed you. I’m sorry for this year. I’ve…I’m sorry.”

“Darling,” Alastor said. “It’s water off of a duck’s back.”

1919

Vox had been with Alastor all break long. He’d leave in the early hours of the morning and, more often than not, he spent the night there. His mother asked where he bided all his time. He shrugged off the question and dipped away.

Vox had kept in contact with Rosie, wanting to keep a friend outside of Alastor. She’d inevitably ended up meeting Alastor and the two got along swimmingly. Eve had been invited to a hang out with the four of them. She was a lovely girl; quite reserved to begin with. The closer she grew to Vox, the more she stepped out of her shell. The four had become quite close over the break.

It was during the month of January that they were all draped around Alastor’s living area. Eve and Rosie had gone through a bottle of cheap wine together while Alastor and Vox were content to simply sit. Alastor was slouched on the two seater couch with Vox on the floor at his feet. Rosie was sitting on the floor and Eve had her head in her lap.

“If we wanted to get our parents off our backs, we could say we were dating each other,” Eve said, holding up a hand like it was the most profound thing she’d ever said. “Or we could, like, marry each other. But not because we *like* each other, but because it’s convenient. And then we just buy a big house and pretend to sleep in the same rooms when actually it’s us-“ Here, she gestured between Rosie and herself. “-that are sharing.”

Rosie shook her head, smiling down at Eve, but Alastor’s gentle caress of his fingers through Vox’s hair slowed slightly.

“We’d have to make it convincing, darling. My mother won’t just accept that I’ve done a full one eighty overnight,” Rosie said. One of her hands tangled with Eve’s.

“Yeah, exactly, that’s why we ‘date’ first and then marry.”

Vox snorted. “What? The four of us have some kind of double wedding?”

“That may not be a terrible idea,” Alastor admitted which caused Rosie and Eve to turn their heads and look at him, both sets of eyebrows raised. Vox felt the hand in his hair still completely. “Pardon me, was I not supposed to agree with you?”

“I just didn’t think you would!” Eve said. “Your mom’s a goldmine. I didn’t think you’d see it as necessary.”

“Well, that would be a little selfish of me, would it not?” The hands resumed their gentle motions. Vox leaned into the contact. “To withhold something simply because I have the privilege of it not negatively impacting me?”

Eve rolled her eyes. “Yeah, yeah. Don’t act like mister righteous all of a sudden. I have no idea what your moral compass is.”

“I don’t think *Alastor* even knows what his moral compass is,” Vox said with a teasing smile.

Rosie shook her head. “I don’t think the words ‘Alastor’ and ‘moral compass’ belong in the same sentence to begin with.”

There was a scoff behind Vox. “Traitorous bunch, the lot of you. Talking about someone as if he were not present.”

Vox tilted his head back against Alastor’s knees to toss him a bright smile, radiating false innocence. Alastor merely offered him a much softer smile in turn.

That afternoon, Vox supposed, was the spark.

Throughout the year, Vox took on odd jobs to earn some savings. He still lived at his parents’ house, but him and Alastor settled into a routine. It was blissfully domestic.

Some mornings after, when Vox had spent the previous night kissing down Alastor’s chest and finding new ways to break him apart, Vox would feel weighted. Dread would gnaw through his oxygen supply, and his lungs felt compressed, so compressed. He’d lie there and stare up at the ceiling and swear this was what being trapped under water felt like. Fear would snake through his veins like poison until he wanted to claw his own skin off.

Until he was spiralling down the pathway of self depreciation. Of *why* he was this way, why Alastor couldn’t have been a girl, why he had to have befriended him all those years ago.

But then Alastor would come into the room with a warm mug of coffee and a fond smile, and Vox found it just that much easier to breathe again.

It was during the middle of the year that Vox decided Rosie and Alastor and Eve should come over for lunch. Or- his mother finally cornered him and told him she would like to meet the people he was spending all his time with. He obliged.

Alastor and Rosie showed up together. Eve arrived a little after them.

Vox knew his mother would take Rosie’s presence the wrong way. He wouldn’t confront her about it unless she asked directly. He saw the discomfort in her smile when Alastor walked

through the door. Some small, spiteful part of him delighted in it.

When they were seated and Vox's mouth was stuffed full of roasted chicken, she asked, "Alastor, sweetie, has anyone caught your eye recently?"

Vox proceeded to choke on his food while, across the table from him, Alastor was wearing an expression akin to amusement. Vox glared at him as soon as he gathered himself again. He could feel the sting of his mother's disapproving stare.

"Naturally," Alastor said, tossing Vox's mother a bright smile. Vox only blinked in shock. "Why, Rosie here was introduced to me recently, thanks to Vincent. She's been good company."

Vox had to keep his eye on his plate and stab into a roast potato to stop himself from snorting. Rosie, who sat beside Alastor, took his words in stride.

"Oh, this charmer," Rosie said, batting Alastor's shoulder. "Always such a sweetheart."

At that, Eve covered up a laugh with a cough. Vox elbowed her ribs and she, in turn, poked him in the side.

"Oh!"

Vox glanced at his mother to see her eyes bright and her smile genuine. The tension in her expression was gone. It made Vox sick. How could she be so happy that Alastor was "courting" Rosie, yet tell him his soul was doomed to eternal damnation if she knew it was really him Alastor was courting.

"Well, that's lovely, darling!" His mother said, her eyes soft with something Vox had never seen directed at him. He wanted to fucking die.

"Vincent and I," Eve started, drawing his mother's gaze to her, "have also been going out."

Well then. That was that plan set in motion.

"Oh." A significantly less enthusiastic tone. "How long?"

"A few weeks."

Eve was looking at him with a smile that didn't quite hide the fact that she found this situation humorous. Vox returned it and then glanced at his mother.

"Why haven't you brought Evelyn over before?" His mother asked, wrongly assuming her voice was still light hearted. Vox heard the hurt undertone, the disappointment.

"It's still early days. I didn't want to overstep."

"Overstep? Honey, your dad brought me home a week into courting me. We got married two months later."

Vox dropped his glaze to his plate and clenched his jaw. He wanted to tell her that it was a completely different time now and that maybe that's why her relationship with his father was turning to shit. He didn't, but the urge was there.

"Two months!" Rosie said, and Vox was grateful for her. "You two must have hit it off right away."

"Oh, we did," Vox's mother was saying. "We met at a wedding, funnily enough. I was a friend of the family and he was a relative to the bride…"

Vox tuned out her voice, focusing on his food instead. He tossed a glance to Alastor. His best friend took a long sip of water from a glass he'd acquired before turning to glance at Vox, an eyebrow raised. Vox felt his expression soften. Alastor's mirrored his. They both looked away before they could be caught.

1921

A year into Vox's relationship with Alastor and his fake relationship with Eve, he'd moved up from simple jobs onto something a little more stable.

Two years into Vox's relationship with Alastor and his fake relationship with Eve, he'd gathered enough money to consider moving into his own place. Or pay for the wedding.

The four had sat down somewhere in the start of the year and figured out that, hey, both Alastor and Vox were working now and Alastor had quite a bit of money saved up already.

When they got to the middle of the year, the proposals happened. The rings were simple, silver things. That night, Alastor had gifted Vox a slim necklace with a ring solely for him.

The four of them decided they wanted to move out of their hometown.

The weddings happened in November on a warm Wednesday afternoon.

The preparations leading up to them were tiring. Thankfully, Eve and Rosie were the ones working on the more important parts. (They were running with their idea of a shared wedding.) (Vox's mother did not really approve.) Alastor and Vox simply had to provide funds.

The decor and guests lists were nothing too extravagant. Rosie had a large family, but they were accounted for by her father. Vox truly didn't mind how many people were there. It wasn't as if the even was anything more than keeping up appearances.

The night before the wedding, Vox and Alastor lay curled up reading together, listening to a gentle hum of soft jazz.

The morning of, when Vox had donned his suit and was busy with his tie, his mother found him. She stood there with something unreadable on her face. Vox didn't like the way it made his gut twist.

"Mom," he greeted her, struggling with the intricacies of tie tying.

“Honey.”

Silence.

The collar of Vox’s shirt was digging into his throat. His fingers itched with the want to scratch lines down his windpipe.

“You’re marrying *Evelyn*,” his mom said, her voice serious. “She’s a nice girl.”

His overcoat was too tight, too restrictive. “She is.”

“You’re going to be good to her.”

“I am.”

“Faithful.”

“Yes.”

His mom’s eyes were piercing. He shied away from their reflection in the mirror. He wondered vaguely if she could sense that he’d been with Alastor all night. That they’d kissed before falling asleep. That Vox had pressed his nose into the slant of Alastor’s neck when he woke. That Alastor had simply smiled and tugged him closer.

She’d probably hate him if she did. Her expression would be one of horror, not whatever it was now.

“Good. That’s good, Vince.” She offered him a strained smile. He didn’t return it.

The getting-married part itself was quick. What came after was not.

During the “party” section of the event when the live band was playing some lively music, Alastor approached Vox at the corner of the room, with a sedated smile and a glass of red wine in his hand. Vox took it without a second thought.

“We are married, it would appear,” Alastor said casually. Vox almost choked on his sip which only elicited Alastor’s amused smile. “To our girls.”

“Oh,” Vox spluttered, gathering himself again. “Yes. Yes.”

“How does it feel?” Alastor tilted his head. “To be a married man?”

Vox rolled his eyes with a laugh. “I don’t know, you tell me.”

Sometime during the celebrations, Vox was approached by Alastor’s mother. She looked a little more tired than she had been when they were kids. There was a sag to her shoulders and several more creases along her face.

“You having fun, sweetheart?” she asked Vox, her smile kind. Vox nodded. “It was nice; that you did it like this.” She was gesturing around at the venue.

“It was Eve’s idea.”

“Oh, I was talking to her earlier. Such a sweet girl. Her and Rosie are lovely.”

Vox offered her a small smile. “They are.”

A hand on Vox’s arm startled him slightly. Alastor’s mother was looking at him, really looking at him, and there was so much love behind those eyes.

“No matter that happens, you are always part of the family.”

A surge of emotions welled up at the back of Vox’s throat, behind his eyes.

“Thank you.”

“You take care of him, yes?”

Vox blinked. “Uh-“

Alastor’s mother laughed lightly. “You have not changed. Alastor. I’m referring to Alastor. Take care of him.”

“Oh, um, sure, I mean, we’re-“

“‘Good friends’, yes,” she said. There was so much light dancing behind her eyes. Vox knew exactly where Alastor’s amused expression came from. “And Evelyn and Rosie are as well. That’s why I’m saying this idea was so smart.” She gestured around her and it only clicked then; the double wedding. “So take care of my boy for me, yes?”

Vox nodded. “Yes.”

She patted his cheek affectionately before vanishing back into the crowd.

Somewhere along the afternoon, enough people were intoxicated or deliriously exhausted that Eve and Rosie were pushed towards the centre of the dance floor. Alastor and Vince were next.

The young women danced together, giggling and wine drunk. Alastor offered Vox a hand. His brown eyes were shining. Someone shoved Vox towards him and the two started dancing as well. Nothing intimate or slow. Nothing revealing. The entire thing was treated by laughter in the crowd. Because *of course* the only way two men or women could dance together was under the guise of a joke. Of course this sort of thing was only acceptable when it was to jest.

“Vincent,” Alastor’s voice was warm. Vincent’s eyes snapped to his. Loving. They were so loving. “There you go.”

Warmth flooded through Vox’s chest.

It was only in the evening that the four made their way to their shared house. It was strangely designed in the sense that the kitchen, lounge and dining room were in the centre of it, like

communal spaces. Two master's bedrooms branched off to opposite sides. Each had their own bathroom. There was a guest bathroom in the entrance hall.

Eve and Rosie chose the room to the right. Vox and Alastor took the one to the left. Their stuff had been moved in when they bought the house.

"Well, that was an awfully long day," Alastor noted when Vox had yanked off his shoes and flopped onto the queen sized bed. There was an old wooden radio atop a vanity dresser that Alastor was tampering with. "No one told me the aftermath of the ceremony would be the main event."

Vox simply hummed in acknowledgement, eyes closed and one arm thrown over his face. The duvet was a soft thing. It reminded him of the old couch his mom kept that belonged to her mother.

"I wish you would take off your coat before getting into bed, darling," Alastor said.

"'m *tired*, Lace."

"So am I and yet you don't see me acting so deranged."

Vox snorted at that. The room filled with the quiet static of a radio dial being tuned before the hum of jazz music replaced it. Alastor kept the volume low enough so it would only serve as a contributor to the atmosphere of the room.

A small smile twitched at the corners of Vox's lips. He removed his hand from his eyes and pushed himself up onto his elbows to look at Alastor. He had shed his overcoat. The sleeves of his button-up shirt were rolled to his elbows in neat folds. The warm glow of the lights in this room highlighted the contrast of the shadow against his throat.

Vox's mouth went dry.

When Alastor noticed the attention, he turned a curious eye to Vox. "Enjoying the view, are we?"

"Come here." Vox was holding out a hand, propping his weight on his left. Alastor simply let out a light laugh. His arms folded across his chest.

"No, I don't think I will."

Vox groaned, flopping back onto the bed, both arms flung out beside him. This was something else they'd explored now that they could actually be *together*; the teasing. Alastor was so much more of a damn tease than Vox had initially thought.

"Giving up the chase easily tonight, are we?" Alastor asked in that stupidly smug voice of his. Vox rolled his eyes.

"I told you, I'm *tired."*

Alastor scoffed, "Too tired to dance with your husband?"

Vox's eyes went wide. Something in his chest clenched almost painfully. *Husband.* His. Alastor was *his*. By law, they weren't each other's. They never would be, but Eve, Rosie and the two of them knew the reason for the joint wedding was so they could pretend. They could imagine.

Vox sat up. Alastor stood before him, one hand extended towards him. Vox took it without hesitation.

Vox was pulled onto his feet and into Alastor's arms. The sway of their bodies to the quiet notes bleeding into the room was not so much a dance as it was a piece of living poetry. Their foreheads were pressed together. Alastor's hands were on Vox's waist. Vox's were on Alastor's shoulders. Both sets of eyes had shut.

"May I have you tonight?" Alastor murmured. His breath held the slightest tang of wine, and the spice of foods from the wedding.

"Of course."

And then Vox was tipping his head to the side and Alastor was following suit, and the kiss was gentle. Tender. Alastor's hands on his waist were easing him back towards the bed. Vox went willingly.

When the back of Vox's legs hit the mattress, he tugged Alastor down with him, laughing against his lips like a love drunk fool. He supposed such a label suited him. Alastor was grasping Vox, and shifting them both over, so that his head was against the pillows. Alastor's hands were warm. Vox blindly started undoing the buttons down his torso. Alastor mirrored him.

"Off," Vox murmured, tugging on Alastor's shirt. He obeyed without hesitation. Perhaps they were both love drunk fools.

"I want to try something," Alastor said, pulling away from the kiss to look at Vox's face. His hands were running down Vox's sides. "May I?"

Vox blinked up at him. "Alright."

Alastor moved back and fished something out of the pocket of his trousers, tossing it onto the duvet. A glass bottle of some sort. Vox frowned at it before his attention was drawn to the click of Alastor's belt buckle. The slide of leather from the belt loops had something warm bloom in Vox's chest. Something like awe. Alastor looked glorious above him the way he was; strands of his brown hair catching in the light like a halo. If that was a sacrilegious thing to think, Vox was only glad his mother had not heard it.

Alastor peeled off his trousers and boxers and tossed them aside. Vox thought he looked lovely naked; all smooth skin and jagged contours.

He was reaching up and Alastor was bending down, before he realised what he was doing. Alastor's lips were soft, and Vox's hands snaked along the back of his scalp to tug him closer.

Those skilled hands were working out the button and zip of Vox's trousers, and then his legs were exposed to the air. He only nipped on Alastor's lip in retort.

Alastor pulled away from the kiss to plant gentle ones along Vox's jawline, down the slope of his neck. Even one on the band of metal fastened around his throat. Vox allowed his body to relax, offered his skin up for Alastor to claim. He lifted his hips to assist in the careful disrobing of his undergarments.

And then Alastor was lowering himself onto his forearms, so that his chest brushed Vox's and the bare flesh of their thighs touched. Alastor was warm. His skin was warm and supple and alive, and Vox had to shut his eyes against the surge of emotions that welled up under his ribs.

Alastor's lips left Vox's throat so he could look Vox in the eye. Brown. Alastor's eyes were brown, and his hair was so soft, and the flesh of his shoulders held slight texture of imperfections.

"You're mine," Vox breathed, cupping Alastor's cheek in his right hand. He watched how brown eyes fluttered shut, how his touch was leaned into. A slight overflow of emotion had his own eyes tearing up. "You're *mine.*" It was whispered like a prayer.

"And you're mine," Alastor said, voice just as light, just as honest. The next inhale was shaky.

"Yours," Vox echoed. He was smiling. A tear tracked down the side of his face, but Alastor was right there to wipe it away.

If Vox hadn't believed in souls up until that point, he would have started then. There was something sacred in the way their skin brushed, in the way Alastor was looking at him. Only he got Alastor this way. Only him.

"And I'm yours," Alastor murmured before kissing him again.

It lasted a while just like that; the gentle kisses, the touches mapping out each other's bodies as if they hadn't had this many times over already. It was different now, Vox supposed. Now that they could love so openly, at least while in these quarters.

When Alastor sat up on his haunches and grabbed the glass bottle, Vox only tilted his head.

"We've used something of the sort before."

Alastor uncapped it and poured a little onto his fingers. He smeared it over his own straining erection and pumped. Vox's eyes darted to his face to catch the instant droop of his shoulders, the slight crease between brows. When Alastor removed his hand, a soft whine escaped his lips. Vox wanted to kiss him again, to drink the sound in like oxygen.

"May I…try it on you?" Alastor asked, brown eyes watching Vox's face carefully. "Here."

The coldness of it shocked a gasp from Vox. Not to mention the skin Alastor was tracing was sensitive. Vox couldn't decide between bringing his knees together or sending them further

apart.

“What are you-?” Vox was frowning slightly. “I mean, what does…How-“

“Sh, sweetheart.” Alastor’s smile was amused. “I would stretch you-“ He circled the ring of muscle and Vox went slightly tense. “-and insert myself. If that’s something you would like to try?”

Vox blinked owlishly at him. “Oh.” He swallowed. “Um, I…I don’t-“

“I can demonstrate on myself first, if that would put your mind at ease.”

“No, no, it’s- You can…on me.” Vox was studying Alastor’s face carefully, trying not to close in on himself. “I trust you.”

Alastor pressed a chaste kiss to his lips and then more down his torso.

The preparation was unfamiliar, but Alastor went slowly, carefully. He guided Vox through it with gentle kisses and reminders to breathe. Vox felt as if Alastor had cracked him open, exposed his underbelly. He felt as if Alastor were able to see all of him, able to feel the swell of emotion in his chest as if it were his own.

With the way Alastor looked at him, perhaps he could.

“Alastor,” Vox breathed, his arms draped over Alastor’s shoulders, his heels digging into Alastor’s thighs. One of Alastor’s hands was beside his head on the duvet. The other was guiding the head to press against Vox.

“I’ve got you,” Alastor said. “I have you, Vi.”

The intrusion was different to Alastor’s fingers, but it didn’t feel *bad.* Just…strange. New. Alastor was studying his face intently and the moment he showed any sign of discomfort, Alastor would pause. Vox didn’t think he’d ever really felt so seen.

Gentle kisses were peppered over Vox’s face when their hips met. Vox was grasping onto his shoulders, his hair, his face. Skin brushed skin, and Vox felt a lump rise in the back of his throat. This was so much. Alastor was *everywhere* and it was *so much*.

When the slow grind of Alastor’s hips started, he let out a low sound against the shell of Vox’s ear. His forearms were bracketing Vox’s head, and their bodies twined so intimately, Vox wasn’t sure where one ended and the other began. He didn’t want either to end. He wanted to *be one* with Alastor, to have the very fabric that made up their beings moulded together.

“You’re perfect,” Alastor murmured into the soft flesh of his throat. “You’re perfect, darling.”

“Alastor-“

“There you go.” His lips were so soft as he pressed an open-mouthed kiss to Vox’s pulse point. The steady rocking of his hips had a vaguely familiar tension forming in the pit of

Vox's stomach. "Just like that."

"Alastor."

"I'm here," Alastor said, his thumb brushed against Vox's cheek. Delicate. Alastor treated him as if he were delicate. "I'm right here. You're safe."

Vox could have cried with how gentle Alastor was being, how he was cradling Vox close to him like shards of broken glass.

"I'm yours," Vox said again, breathless. Wanting. The stir of his own cock against his stomach was expected. The urge to come with Alastor, to finish together as if it would somehow bind them, was less expected. "Tell me- *ngh*, *please*- tell me I'm yours."

"You're mine." Heat bloomed through Vox's stomach. "You're all mine."

"Yes. Yes."

"*Fuck,* Vince. You're-" A nip to the juncture where throat bled into shoulder. The roll of hips was a little faster. Vox tugged Alastor a little closer, held him a little tighter. "*Shit*."

A breathless laugh escaped Vox's lungs. "I'm shit?" His voice sounded strained.

Alastor's own huff fanned against Vox's cheek, his ear. He slowed momentarily to look Vox in the eye. "Impossible man."

Vox was grinning, a wide tearful thing. He inhaled shakily. "Yours."

Alastor's smile mirrored his own. "Entirely mine."

He leaned forward to capture Vox's lips in his own, his tongue running along the seam of them.

It was a little while after Alastor got a hand around Vox that they finished together.

The aftermath was a little more tender and a little more uncomfortable than usual, but Alastor was gentle with cleaning Vox too.

When the lights were turned off, and the pair was under the covers in nothing more than undergarments, Vox took to admiring the smooth contours of Alastor's facial features. Alastor was studying him as if he was something incredible. Something worth studying.

"I think," Vox said softly, "that you're quite possibly my best friend."

Creases formed around Alastor's eyes. "Is that so?"

"Mm." Vox's smile was lazy. His limbs felt as though they were made of syrup. "My favourite too."

"Your favourite?"

“Person. You’re my favourite person.”

There was a warmth behind Alastor’s eyes that felt like home. “Even over Rosie and Eve?”

“Yeah.”

He gasped dramatically. “Sacrilege!”

Vox rolled his eyes, burrowed closer to Alastor. He tucked his face into Alastor’s chest. “Aren’t I yours too?”

“You do happen to be up there.”

Vox snorted. “Up there. Wow.”

“I can’t go around placing you on a pedestal, dear.” He could hear the grin in Alastor’s voice. “What would the papers say?”

“Oh, right, can’t let those damn papers get us.”

There was a pause after that in which Vox could feel himself drifting off. Alastor’s hand running soothing lines and up and down his spine felt like some kind of lullaby.

It was only in the split seconds before he was dragged under that he heard the rumble of Alastor’s voice murmur, “I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

This may actually end up being five chapters. All depends on how the next chapter goes

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!